



# Purbita

AT THE PAST



*A book by Tanay*

## *Chapter 1: Strings Attached*

I sit on the edge of my bed, the soles of my shoes just skimming the wood floor. The sun rises high into the sky streaming through the worn curtains that drape the windows of my family's old home. It shines brightly on dust motes that dance about in the air, coating the tiny room that is my haven. The familiar scent of damp old books fills the air, mellowed by the faint but comforting aroma of my favorite jasmine perfume, just like a soft memory of better days.

My gaze drowns lazily to the corner of the room, where my guitar leans silently against the wall. Its polished wooden surface reflects the sunbeams in streaks, giving it an appearance as if it is almost alive. I have given it a name—"Serenity"—a name to epitomize calmness and peace. Ironically, my life is a far cry from serene at this moment. The guitar stands as a silent reminder of dreams I once cherished, which now feel distant and unattainable.

Just when I let out that heavy sigh and allowed the morose to settle over me like a familiar old friend, a voice cuts across the room, bright as if drenched in life-giving sunshine.

"Hey, Purbita! Are you coming to the café later?" Alia's voice reverberates warmly, as if sunshine has broken the heavy silence. Her face peeks through the half-open door with her characteristic grin. She seems to carry with her a whole world of light and laughter, an almost infectious energy. She flows into my dimly lit world, effortlessly charming as she moves, leaving trails of music in her wake as she laughs.

I force a smile, trying to relax into it a little better, but it comes off as stiff and a little awkward, like I'm putting on an old dress that doesn't fit as well as it used to. "Sure," I say, my voice both hesitant and compliant. "Just give me a minute."

Alia and I have a bond that's comforting yet complicated. We're a unit to the world - half and half of the absolutely aligned social media look. In reality, though, often I feel I stand behind

her, like an unseen ghost hovering on the fringes of her fabulous radiance. Alia manages to capture all moments in life through her phone while always framing her camera with great precision to get these perfectly radiant photographs. Meanwhile, my own photographs are clumsy, mere snapshots of a world in which I don't really belong, each one reminding me of all the ways in which I fail.

## *Chapter 2: Café of Dreams*

We walk slowly down the busy street, turning to our favorite place, this little café tucked away from all the noise of the city. This is always a little haven, a small sanctuary of warmth and comfort. When we push open the door, the soft chime of the bell above gives notice of our arrival. Inside, the atmosphere is just as inviting as ever, with sheer white curtains swaying gently in the breeze and rustic wooden tables arranged in a way that makes the space feel both intimate and spacious. The walls are adorned with mismatched art, each piece telling its own quiet story, while the muted hum of conversation blends with the soft tunes playing in the background.

A fresh coffee, its aromatic fumes wrapping us in its warmth and a familiar caress, seems to still my rioting thoughts for just this little while. We take our seat in our favourite corner- that snug table near the window where we get to view the whole outside world. Alia wastes no time in reaching out for the order and walking over to the counter to put it across. She's confident and decisive, as always, quickly asking for her go-to drink—a caramel latte topped generously with whipped cream, complete with a drizzle of caramel syrup that makes it almost too pretty to drink.

I, however, settle for my regular black coffee. Just plain, no-frills. It's one of those tastes acquired, one that echoes my reclusive nature. I sit back and observe the barista pour the dark liquid into a white ceramic cup with the steam curling upwards in delicate swirls.

There's a party at Ryan's this weekend," Alia declares out of the blue, her voice piercing my thoughts like a jolt of electricity. She's scrolling through her phone, her fingers dancing across the screen with the practiced ease of a seasoned pro. "We should go! It'll be fun!" Her enthusiasm is infectious, her tone so bright and bubbly that it almost makes me want to agree. Almost.

Inside, though, is a different story. It weighs down on me; this old heaviness inside has been there for far too long. Parties were the stuff of quiet dread for me, being loud and chaotic, full of people one never knew and conversations in which I felt I didn't fit. It's a world that Alia

moves through like breathing while I shrink away from myself. "I don't know..." I mumble, my voice trailing off as I reach for my coffee. I swirl the liquid absent-mindedly, watching the ripples form on the surface, tiny waves mirroring the turbulence inside me.

Alia isn't giving up that easy, of course. "C'mon, Purbita!" she insists, her face a playful grin leaning forward. "It's just a small gathering. Nothing crazy." Her mischievous eyes sparkle over as she adds, "Besides, Gaurav's going."

At the mere mention of his name, my heart skips a beat, followed by a sudden rush of anxiety. Gaurav. The quiet, brilliant boy who has unknowingly taken up residence in my thoughts, his calm demeanor and thoughtful words playing on a loop in my mind. He's the kind of person who exists in a different league, someone I admire from a distance but would never dare to approach. The mere thought of sharing the same space with him sends a rush of nervous energy coursing through me, exciting and terrifying at the same time.

But ever so observant, Alia watches my cheeks flush out and smirks in full knowledge. "Now, see? You have to come," she teases nudging me. But with forced laughter, the war continued in me—a battle within as how my soul craved to push past my comfort zone yet shivered at the threat of the unknown.

## *Chapter 3: A Silent Melody*

The evening draws quietly, the world outside my window bathed in the soft hues of twilight. I sit cross-legged on my bed, my guitar, *Serenity*, resting gently in my lap. My fingers move instinctively over the strings, coaxing a soft, soothing melody that fills the room. Each note feels like a thread, weaving a fragile tapestry of peace amidst the chaos of my thoughts.

As I play, my mind drifts once again to Gaurav. His image appears unbidden and is vivid in its clarity: the way his hair falls messily over his forehead, the quiet intensity of his eyes as he focuses on his work, and the rare but genuine smile that lights up his otherwise serious face. I wonder what he sees when he looks at me. Does he see the dark circles under my eyes, carved by sleepless nights wrestling with worries I can't seem to shake? Does he feel the exhaustion clinging to me like an old, threadbare blanket that I can't quite cast off?

I hum softly, my voice blending with the gentle strumming of the guitar. It's a small tune, one I have done a million times before; tonight, however, those notes weigh heavier, doused with unsaid emotions. Singing has always been a way of escape—a passageway into a parallel universe in which I might shed all my insecurities and recreate myself, for at least a moment, in another life. In the parallel universe of music, I am someone confident who can stand out without apprehension about judgment.

But reality has a way of pulling me back, and the illusion shatters with a harsh reminder of the life I can't escape. My gaze falls on the stack of textbooks piled precariously on my desk, their spines cracked from use. My exams are just around the corner, looming ominously like dark, foreboding clouds that threaten to unleash a storm. The thought brings a pang of anxiety through me and sends my song into faltering upon the weight of my responsibilities.

I glance at my grades, the numbers glaring back at me from the crumpled sheets of paper. No matter how much time and energy I pour into studying, it feels like I'm running in place, unable to move forward. My best efforts are always marred by a constant source of stress—a cruel reminder of my perceived inadequacies.

I breathe deeply and lay Serenity in her corner. The glow of the moonlight creeping through the window dances off the shine of her surface. The room quiets back to stillness except for a slight rustling of wind outside. I lie down on the bed, eyes staring at the ceiling. My mind is a turmoil of worries, doubts, and melodies that seem to go by so quickly.

Yet, in the silence, there's a tiny flicker of hope—a whisper that maybe, just maybe, I'll find my way through the darkness.



## Chapter 4: The Party Whirlwind

It is before I know it, much too soon that the night of the party has finally arrived. Time, in my view, ran so fast it left me struggling to catch up with it. Alia is radiating energy and excitement that is bubbling over as she flits about the room choosing accessories and changing her outfit around. I, on the other hand, feel like a reluctant passenger on a train speeding toward an inevitable disaster. Before I know it, she's practically dragging me out the door, her arm hooked around mine, her chatter a constant stream of encouragement that I only half absorb.

We walk into the night, with its cold crisp air, faintly fragranced by the scent of city life: distant car fumes, a hint of street food from stalls and, as we reach Ryan's place, the sound grows, and I can feel this deep bassline throb into the pavement. The place is vibrant, the glow of lights spilling out onto the lawn as small groups of people cluster there, laughing and talking animatedly.

Inside, the air is charged. The music vibrates through the floorboards, pulsating in rhythm with my racing heart. The living room is filled to the brim with people, a kaleidoscope of movement and sound as friends hug each other enthusiastically and others lose themselves in the rhythm of the music. Alia is in her element here. She moves with ease, like she is the star of her own movie, cutting through the crowd.

I, however, hold to the edges, trying to make myself invisible, to become a shadow blending into the wallpaper. The weight of so many eyes and conversations is what presses down on me—the each burst of laughter, shout-like a spotlight which I would want to avoid with all my might.

And then I see him. Gaurav. He stands in the corner of the room, leaning against the wall, surrounded by a group of people. His attention does not have to be made known; his quiet charm draws everyone around him like a magnet. He is laughing at something, his smile full and wide, and my heart takes off. It feels as if my chest can barely contain this wild rhythm of emotions.



Let's get drinks!" Alia's voice pulls me out of my daze. Her hand finds mine, gripping it firmly as she guides me toward the refreshment table. I nod silently, letting her lead while my mind remains fixed on that one moment—Gaurav's smile, the sound of his laughter still echoing faintly in my ears.

As we push through the throng, I can't help but sneak another peek his way. This time, he is looking back at me. For that brief, charged moment, our eyes connect. His eyes are steady, soft, and disarmingly kind. It feels like everything else in the room fades into the background, the music and the chatter fading until it is only the two of us in that fleeting connection.

In that one instant, something shifts. For the first time in what feels like an eternity, I feel like I am seen—not as Alia's quieter friend or a wallflower trying to disappear, but as me. My breath catches, my heart skips a beat, and then the moment is gone. He looks away, his attention pulled back to the conversation around him, and the noise of the party crashes back in like a tidal wave.

Alia hands me a drink, and I snap back to reality as she says with a grin, raising her glass for a toast, "Relax, Purbita; this is going to be fun." I force a smile, clinking my glass against hers. The night stretches ahead, uncertain and filled with possibilities, but for now, I take a sip and let the warmth of the drink steady my nerves.

## *Chapter 5: Crossed Chords*

The night drags on, a whirlwind of music, laughter, and conversations I can hardly follow. After a few forced smiles, half-hearted nods, and dances that feel like an obligation rather than joy, Alia catches a glimpse of my growing unease. With a soft yet firm grip, she steers me toward the back yard, pushing through the pack of partygoers. The moment we step outside, a rush of cool air greets us, which is refreshing compared to the stifling chaos inside.

The backyard is a haven of quiet compared to the house that is packed. The night sky above us is clear, sprinkled with countless stars that twinkle faintly against the inky blackness. The breeze stirs the leaves on nearby trees, and for an instant, I close my eyes to let the peace wash over me. The serenity of this setting doesn't make me feel anywhere near relaxed, though; the party noise may be gone, but the din in my head is not any quieter.

Alia studies me with a mix of curiosity and concern, her usually bright demeanor tempered by genuine care. "Why are you so quiet tonight?" she asks, tilting her head as she leans against the railing of the porch. Her tone is softer than usual, the teasing edge replaced by something more serious.

I hesitate, unsure if I should let the words escape. But their weight is too heavy to be borne for long. "I don't know..." I say, my voice only above a whisper above the rustling leaves. "Maybe I'm overanalyzing everything. The exams, Gaurav..." The mention of his name seems heavy on my tongue as if revealing some secret I'd kept close to my heart for too long. The rest of it tumbled out of my mouth as I could not stop it. "What if he does not like me?"

Alia's countenance changes in an instant. Her rolling eyes are accompanied by an impish smile, teasing yet reassuring. "Purbita, he's looked at you all night! I mean, do you really need any more hints than that? Just go out and talk to him already.

I shake my head, biting my lip. Approaching Gaurav seems an impossible feat, like trying to scale

a mountain without any gear. "What if I embarrass myself? What if I say something stupid?"

Alia moves closer, reaching across to place a hand on my shoulder. Her voice softens even further, losing its usual teasing lilt. "Listen," she says with a serious tone, "if I can't convince you, then just remember this—that he's probably just as nervous as you are. Perhaps more." She grins and gives my shoulder an encouraging squeeze. "You'll never know unless you try."

Before I can even conjure up a response, the old familiar weight of doubt and anxiety settles once again heavily in my chest. It's like an old friend I wish I could uninvite, always showing up unannounced. I look down at my feet, kicking at the loose gravel on the ground, feeling the familiar tug-of-war inside me—one side urging me to take a chance, the other pulling me back into the comfort of my solitude.

And then, as if on cue, the door behind us creaks open. I glance up, my heart skipping a beat as Gaurav steps outside. He looks almost hesitant, his hands stuffed deep into the pockets of his jacket. His gaze darts around briefly before landing on me, and his expression softens. There's an uncertainty etched into his features, a vulnerability I've never noticed before.

The whole world seems to grow both impossibly large and impossibly small all at once, feeling my pulse staccato as butterflies dance in my stomach, as he stands there in the soft glow of the porch light. For a moment, we don't say anything; silence stretches between us like a bridge waiting to be crossed. Alia, having sensed the tension, gives me a quick nudge and slip back inside with a knowing smile, leaving me standing there with Gaurav, and the stars above us, and the faint hum of the party drifting through the air.

## Chapter 6: Sharing Shadows

Our conversation starts awkwardly, like a hesitant melody, each of us fumbling for the right words. Gaurav scratches the back of his neck, a small, endearing habit that makes him seem less intimidating, while I find myself nervously shifting my weight from one foot to the other. The air between us feels charged, not with tension but with possibility, like a canvas waiting for the first stroke of paint.

"So," he starts, his voice slightly unsure, "do you come to these kinds of parties often?"

I laugh quietly, shaking my head. "Not really. Alia dragged me here. She thinks I need to 'get out more.'"

He grins at that, the curve of his mouth up and outward in a way that seems both amused and sympathetic. "Yeah, I get that. These things aren't really my scene either.

With that shared admission, the initial awkwardness starts to fade away, replaced by something warmer, more comfortable. Our words begin to flow, and soon, the conversation deepens. We talk about music first—an easy topic for both of us. I tell him about Serenity, my guitar, and he nods, his eyes lighting up as he shares his own love for classical piano.

I began when I was ten," he says with a hint of nostalgia. "To begin with, I despised it—too much rules, too much of structure. But then realized it's like telling a story without words. That's when it clicked."

"That's beautiful," I tell him, genuinely moved. "I never thought of it like that before.

From music, we now shift to literature where I trade favorite books and authors like secrets. I

explain how I lose myself in poems, how the rhythm of words feels like a song in itself. To my surprise, he is reciting a line from one of my favorite poems, and I am left staring at him, stunned and happy.

As we talk, I find myself laughing more than I have in weeks, maybe months. It's not just polite laughter but the kind that feels like it comes from someplace deep and genuine. The loneliness that has been my constant companion fades into the background, replaced by a sense of connection I hadn't realized I was longing for. And amidst the thrumming of my heart, I start to see Gaurav—not just as the distant, brilliant crush I've admired from afar, but as someone real, someone kind, someone who sees me in return.

Then, out of nowhere, he asks, "Have you ever thought about performing?"

The question hangs in the air, unexpected and weighty. My cheeks flush instantly, the warmth spreading across my face as I stammer, "I... I sing, but only at home. Sometimes for Alia, but that's it. I don't think I'm good enough."

He furrows his brow, then tilts his head back as if considering my words. "Not true," he says after a moment, his tone firm but gentle. "You have something special. I can tell. You just need to let people in and share your voice."

His encouragement lingers between us like an unplayed note, waiting to find its place in the symphony of our conversation. It is not only his words that strike me but the way he says them—with quiet conviction, as if he genuinely believes in me. The weight of his gaze feels almost tangible, and for a moment, I cannot bring myself to look away.

"I don't know...." I whisper, dropping my eyes to my hands. "It's hard. To put yourself out like that."

"It is," he agrees softly. "But that's what makes it worthwhile. The things we are afraid of? They

are usually the things that are the most important."

His words resonate with something so deep inside me, stirring within me a quiet hope I didn't even know I still carried inside. As I look at him, his expression open, sincere, I begin wondering if he's right—maybe it's time for me to stop hiding; maybe it's time I let the world see the pieces of me I've kept under wraps for so long.

The night feels different now. Shadows around us no longer seem so intimidating, nor do the stars shine upon us any brighter. And in this moment, I come to understand that Gaurav's encouragement is not about the music; it's more about life, about stepping out of the shadows and letting yourself be seen.

## *Chapter 7: A Sweet Start*

The night gathers around us. The distant hum of the party fades away into the oblivion as if the universe, too, understood that this moment is meant to be shared with no one but ourselves. The breeze is cool, carrying a hint of jasmine and fresh cut grass, accompanied by the warmth of Gaurav's presence alongside me. It feels like the world has shrunk to just the two of us, enveloped in the quiet intimacy of a conversation that somehow has become something more.

Our words lag between us like the last chords of a song neither of us is ready to finish. In Gaurav's face, I see fragments of vulnerability: the slight furrow of his brows, the way his lips press into each other, as though he's taking each word before he speaks them. I have never seen this part of him, and somehow it is the one making my walls fall.

As I look down at my hands, not knowing what to say in the silence, I feel it—a tender brush against my fingers. His hand, tentative and soft, touches mine, pulling my gaze upward. It makes my heart skip a beat, that fluttering that seems to echo within every part of me. The spark of that touch feels electric, undeniable, like something greater than either of us has orchestrated this moment.

"Purbita," he says softly, his voice steady but with a nervous tremble. He pauses for a breath before saying, "I really like you."

The words hang in the air between us, simple yet profound, their weight settling into my chest. For a moment, the world feels impossibly still, as though even the stars are holding their breath.

My breath hitches and I look to him to see if perhaps it's all a dream, but his eyes are as serious as they are candid; they don't reveal anything at all. The words come out of him sincerely. His confession shakes something inside me, and what then dissolves into insignificance is everything else—the troubles and fears and low thoughts of mine.



"I like you too," I whisper, the words trembling as they leave my lips. They feel both terrifying and freeing, a truth I've kept locked away now soaring into the night.

His smile is small, but it's genuine enough to light up his whole face; and in that instant, I feel the warmth of it inside my own chest. It is a smile that promises something unspoken, a beginning at which neither of us could have arrived but both seem ready to embrace.

We sit side by side on the porch steps, the silence between us now comfortable and full of possibility. The weight I've carried for so long—the burden of exams, the self-doubt that clings to my music, the quiet battles with my own mind—feels lighter somehow. Not gone entirely, but no longer overwhelming.

Gaurav says little more after that, and he doesn't need to. His presence is enough, grounding me in a way I hadn't thought possible. The sound of crickets fills the air, a natural symphony that seems to echo the quiet harmony between us.

In his company, I begin to see something I haven't dared to imagine in a long time: a pathway forward, illuminated not just by the promise of love but by the possibility of healing. It's not a grand revelation but a quiet one, a realization that maybe—just maybe—I don't have to carry everything alone.

As the night keeps going, I lean my head against his shoulder, and the constant worries that usually swarm around my mind retreat into shadows. For the first time in what feels like forever, I let myself just be.

## Chapter 8: The Way Forward

Life doesn't transform into a fairytale overnight. The challenges don't magically disappear, nor do the doubts that linger in the corners of my mind. There are still the restless nights, the relentless pressure of exams, and the endless hours spent wrestling with my guitar, trying to coax the right notes from its strings. But something has shifted—subtle, yet powerful.

Gaurav's words echo in my mind at the strangest times, like a quiet mantra: You just need to let people in. At first, they feel like fragile whispers, but slowly, they grow stronger, weaving themselves into the fabric of my thoughts. It's as if those words have planted seeds in the soil of my mind, and now, they're beginning to sprout, reaching for the sunlight.

My days are still a blend of highs and lows, but they feel different now—less overwhelming, more manageable. The lows don't drag me down as deeply, and the highs seem brighter, more vivid. Alia, ever the unshakable force in my life, stands by me like a pillar, her laughter and optimism a constant reminder that I'm never truly alone. She doesn't let me retreat into myself for too long, pulling me out of my head and into the present moment with her effortless charm.

My guitar, Serenity, becomes more than just an instrument; it's my voice, my outlet, my anchor. Each strum feels like a step forward, a declaration of resilience. I find myself playing more often, not just for myself but for others too. Alia convinces me to post a short clip on social media, and though it terrifies me, I do it. The response is surprisingly kind, and for the first time, I feel a flicker of pride in my music.

And then there's Gaurav. Our budding romance isn't a whirlwind of grand gestures or dramatic confessions. It's quiet, steady, and real—a series of small moments that string together like notes in a melody. A walk home after class, his hand brushing mine. An evening spent talking about our dreams and fears, the hours slipping away unnoticed. The way he listens when I play for him, his eyes closed, as if he's letting the music carry him somewhere far away.

He doesn't try to fix me, and for that, I'm grateful. He simply stands beside me, offering his

quiet support and his unwavering belief in my potential. It's not a solution to all my problems, but it's a comfort—a reminder that I don't have to face everything alone.

There are still moments when the weight of it all feels like too much, when my insecurities threaten to pull me under. But in those moments, I think of the people who believe in me: Alia, who sees the best in me even when I can't; Gaurav, who looks at me like I'm something extraordinary; and myself, slowly learning to see my worth.

Every time I pick up Serenity, I play a little louder, a little braver. My songs begin to shift, no longer just a reflection of my struggles but a celebration of my resilience, my growth, my hope. With every note, I feel myself moving forward, step by step, chord by chord.

Life is still messy and chaotic, but within that chaos, I find harmony. It's in the laughter shared with Alia, the warmth of Gaurav's presence, the music that flows through me like a river. It's in the realization that even when the melody falters, the song is still worth playing.

Purbita's story isn't about perfection—it's about persistence. It's about the power of love, connection, and creativity to pull us through life's most challenging moments. It's a reminder that even when the world feels like a cacophony, there's a melody waiting to be discovered. And sometimes, it's in the act of creating that melody that we find our way forward.